

GUIDE

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CURRENT PRACTICE IN CONVERT WORK

Manuel Costa and Glen Shrope

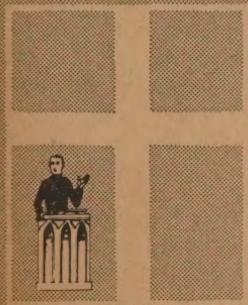
WHAT DOES "KERYGMATIC" MEAN?

F. Somerville, S.J.

THE RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Philip Scharper

OCTOBER 1961, No. 161



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IT SEEMS TO ME

Realistic Optimism

“The Realistic Optimism of the Popes.” An enterprising freelance journalist would find no dearth of material on this theme in all the recent popes. And after some homework on Pope John, the writer would have enough matter for a fat book.

“Our era,” says Pope John in his latest encyclical, “is penetrated and shot through by radical errors, it is torn and upset by deep disorders. Nevertheless, it is also an era in which immense possibilities for good are opened to the Church.”

Who knows better than the popes the huge obstacles to the spread of religion? Organized and ruthless atheism behind the Iron and Bamboo curtains; widespread defections in once Catholic lands; and unrelenting persecutions in our century that rivals Diocletian! Lesser men might have grown disheartened. But the popes also see a succession of doors opening for the action of the Church, and they have inspired a Catholic revival that may surpass any that the Church has ever known.

When Catholics take their cue from the popes they, too, recognize opportunities to make the Church more vitally present in our world. Take the problem of winning converts in our country. Despite its magnitude and complexity, the Knights of Columbus thirteen years ago decided to do something about it.

Their attractive ads and Correspondence Course have since become a shining feature of American Catholicism. Far from falling off in effectiveness the Knights can assert in their latest report, “a record-breaking response. . . . An increase of 20,000 requests for information over the previous year. . . . Interest in the Catholic Faith continues at a high level among the non-Catholics of the United States.”

Every parish in our country should be prepared to match this interest with an organized plan for the instruction of inquirers. We will not convert America in a hurry. But we should be ready to welcome those who are interested.

JOHN T. McGINN, C.S.P.

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Current Practice in Convert Work

By Manuel Costa and Glen Shrope

When the Bride of Christ, the Church, was born from Christ's opened side amid earthquake and thunder, she was at that very moment essentially all that she would ever be. Already she burned with Christ's own thirst for souls, and the sweep of her loving glance embraced all men of all time. Hers it was to teach and rule and sanctify every man, since every man who ever comes into this world is to be born again from her of water and the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit descended upon her in power and wisdom and love, she began at once to reach out mightily to the corners of the earth to lift men up into the supernatural life which enlivens her and to lead them to the eternal Love-embrace of Christ. In her temporal activity her goal is never reached. Her thirst is never quenched. As long as there is one sheep which does not yet belong to the one fold, her desire burns within her, giving her neither rest nor peace.

Today the Bride of Christ lives in every country of the world. And, just as in the beginning, she thirsts everywhere and always to bring men to Christ. Whether it be in a large metropolitan area, in a suburban parish, or in a small mission center, her desire presses her to seek all men, to unite them to herself, and thus to present them to her Spouse. The story of her work is a mosaic of success and failure, of renewed effort, and of differing approaches. In this article we shall see a sample of the plans, ideas, and experiences of Patrician alumni in the convert-work by which they seek to satisfy the thirst of the Bride of Christ.

We will examine recruiting methods, teaching content, teaching techniques, the actual reception of converts, follow-up work, and conclude with a few observations about the convert himself and the priest as convert-instructor.

There are several methods of recruiting prospective converts. The fundamental way, according to the priest-alumni, is through the parish bulletin and pulpit announcements. There are often non-Catholics in the congregation who are interested, but the greatest value of announcing the classes from the pulpit lies in the fact that many Catholics have friends or relatives who have expressed an interest in the Church. These Catholics tell the interested party about the classes, and also supply the encouragement which may be needed. Since most prospects come through contact with a Catholic, the bulletin and pulpit are the surest and most effective means of letting the non-Catholic know about the instruction course.

Other methods which have been used successfully are giving hand cards to the children attending catechism classes, and placing signs in the vestibule of the church. Notices in the local newspaper and in the diocesan newspaper have brought some response. The Legion of Mary members contact interested persons while taking census and on parish visits; these can be re-contacted by the Legion members and invited and encouraged to attend the classes. One priest suggested that letters be sent to the non-Catholic party of mixed marriages and to those non-Catholics who have stopped at the parish to ask questions during the year. This has proved to be effective.

Along with advertising, sermons on the apostolic spirit of the Church enlivens parish interest and enthusiasm. Each parish-

This article is based on clerical replies to questions on parochial convert work asked by seminarians. Through the courtesy of *The Patrician*, St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, California. Spring, 1960, issue.

ioneer should be told that he has an important part in bringing those outside the Church into the "one fold." The parishioners should be encouraged to pray for conversions and for the success of the instruction classes.

The lay members of a parish should be made aware of the role which they play in bringing interested persons to the priest for instruction. Through charity and friendship, their example extends a strong invitation and welcome to the non-Catholic. The greater portion of those who come to the priest seeking information and instruction are first made to take notice of the Church by the good example of a Catholic relative, friend, or neighbor.

All the priests agree that the convert should be encouraged to bring his friends to the classes; however, after the first few classes, it is better to have them wait for the new series of instructions.

CONTENT

The second general topic concerns the teaching content of the instruction series. Here the emphasis is heavy upon motivation. Habits and motivation must be instilled as well as information. The instructor must urge prospective converts to pray, especially for light and for the gift of Faith. He must encourage them, too, to go to Mass every Sunday. "People don't become good Christians out of a book, but by sharing in the life of God's Family through participation in the life of Christ as lived in the Liturgical Year." The theme around which the whole teaching is centered differs somewhat from priest to priest, and yet there is a very close relationship among the varying points of view. The Incarnation-Redemption ranks top among the choices, along with the "Mystical Body as the extension of the Incarnation and Redemption," "God's immeasurable personal love for the individual," and "Christ's goodness and love and mercy." Sanctifying grace and the "Mystery of Christ—the worship of God the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit," are other themes that have been used.

The point of doctrine stressed most in the course of instructions also varies somewhat, but there is almost general agreement that "the unity of the Church and Christ as expressed in the Mystical Body" is primary.

Grace, worship, the Sacraments, and the Mass—the vital activities and life of the Church—also rate special attention.

Faith of Millions is urged as a text by several priests with good results. A few of the other suggested texts are the *Catechism for Inquirers*, *Father Smith Instructs Jackson*, and the new *Life of Christ*. It was also mentioned that the small *Jesus and I* catechism serves very well in giving a complete Christ-centered picture of Catholicism to the very simple people who would find a more advanced text too difficult. Use of the Missal and reading from the New Testament are "musts" for the prospective convert.

Most priests give a general outline of Catholicism in their first instruction. They relate this to the love which the person is to find and develop in the Church. This, along with the meaning and place of religion in our lives, is the best way to show the individual what to expect and to begin motivation from the very first class so that "the Faith becomes a very part of their personality."

When we come to the matter of the most difficult doctrine and the most appealing doctrine from the convert's point of view, we come upon a very interesting situation. In BOTH cases, priests list the authority of the Church and Confession. For some these are the most difficult; but for others, the most appealing. It is often a problem for the non-Catholic to understand "the need for supernatural help and the supernatural life in general." It is difficult to see that natural powers and virtues are not enough since only these fall within the realm of experience. The human personality of Christ, participation in the life of Christ through the Sacraments, and participation in the worship of Christ through the Mass are other teachings listed among those which most appeal to the convert.

Most priests save the Last Things for the last class, but some use the last classes for a review of the whole teaching with a special emphasis on "a virtuous life founded upon the frequent reception of Penance and Holy Communion."

Of all the points discussed, few, if any, received the general enthusiastic reception given to the use of Sacred Scripture. It has a "vital role in every class and every topic," and Bible History—both from the

Old and New Testaments—is used to illustrate and to teach. "Scripture cannot be overemphasized!"

Very little apologetics is generally given in the instructions. "The average sincere convert needs only dogma. He simply wants to learn everything." However, some priests said that "logic appeals to the mind even if the person himself is not too logical. Apologetics assures the convert that there is an intellectual approach to religion and helps him to discuss it intelligently."

All of the priests give, or have a layman give a tour of the Church with an explanation of all the articles and little rites which are so familiar to the Catholic, but so strange to the non-Catholic. "They think everyone in the church knows they are new. This embarrassment is removed by 'the tour.'"

Now that we have seen something about recruiting methods and teaching content, we turn our attention to teaching techniques: how can the priest best convey the joyful message of salvation to his converts?

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL

The first question to be decided is whether to use the class or the individual type of instruction. Some priests prefer the class method, others the individual. Those who lean toward group instruction offer the following as its advantages: it saves time for the priest, helps him to avoid unnecessary repetition, and spurs him on to prepare his lectures more carefully than he would if he had to talk with only one person. Furthermore, a number of people willingly come to a class who, in the beginning at least, would grow pale at the prospect of facing a priest alone. And the members of a class gain encouragement and learn from one another as well as from the instructor.

The advocates of individual instruction, on the other hand, say that the surer and more intimate knowledge of a person's personality, intelligence and problems gained through personal interviews can help one to reach the prospective convert more effectively. One priest also mentioned that he can teach much more in a shorter time on an individual basis.

There was general agreement, moreover, that even though the class method be used, the priest should be available before and after the instruction for anyone who might wish to speak with him in private. And he

should make it a point to take each person for from three to five individual instructions to iron out personal difficulties and problems and to certify that the convert has a firm grasp of the essentials.

A few of our correspondents suggested that qualified lay instructors could and should be used. They could teach one or more prospective converts in their homes. "*The ideal*," writes one alumnus, "*is for the priest to have many well trained lay catechists give individual instructions*" after he himself had given a preliminary instruction to get acquainted, answer questions, and convey a general spirit. Once the lay instructor has finished, the priest also gives a final instruction or two. The result of such a system, writes another, will be: "The convert will not only be well instructed, but he will also have a Catholic friend."

What is the best time for instructions? How long should they last? All agree that sometime between 7:30 and 9:00 in the evening, preferably in the first part of the week, turns out to be the most suitable arrangement. The group should meet once a week, and each class should be about an hour long, and certainly not extend beyond an hour and fifteen minutes. Some believe, however, that once a week leaves too long a period between classes. They advocate having class twice a week and thus keeping the lessons fresh in the convert's mind. A question concerning the number of instructions brought replies varying from sixteen to fifty, or time-wise from three to six months.

LECTURE METHOD

The lecture type instruction is the most widely used mode of presentation. Its chief advantage is that one can teach an entire point without interruption. However, "one must constantly anticipate the objections in the minds of his hearers and answer them in the course of the evening. One should be his own '*advocatus diaboli*.'" When the subject allows it, the priest may employ some discussion, but in general, discussion is not feasible because "one must know something in order to discuss it, but converts come to learn things for the first time." Also, some priests like to ask questions in class to see how they are "getting through"; others believe that directing questions to individuals embarrasses them and puts them on the spot in front of the others.

Both audio and visual aids have found an important role to play in convert instructions: tapes from the Liturgical Conference, movies or slides of the Mass, large pictures of the life of Christ, charts issued by the Catholic Information Society, altar equipment and vestments, and, of course, the blackboard are all used with success. And the people greatly enjoy and profit from demonstration Masses and trips through the church.

The *"question box,"* too, is very helpful. It is usually Catholics who are taking a refresher course in the inquiry class that find the question box especially convenient. It encourages them to propose questions they might not otherwise ask for fear of being thought to be ignorant of their religion. And another observation: "A 'question box' is the only way in a group instruction. If the questions are apropos, I answer them at the beginning of every class. Free questioning never works very well. An intellectual person will get you way over the heads of the others; a less intelligent person will often waste time for the class by being redundant, or by asking questions not pertaining to the present doctrine being taught."

SKILLFUL REPETITION

Frequent repetition of key points ("Take ten or fifteen of the key points to be remembered and keep repeating them in each class almost *'ad nauseam'*"), presenting the same doctrine from several viewpoints, and effective use of concrete and understandable stories and examples serve to clarify the instructions and impress them on the class. And if one prepares carefully, making judicious use of the aforementioned aids and techniques, he will have no trouble in sustaining interest.

The non-Catholic who has completed his instructions and wishes to be baptized is then examined to see if his knowledge of the Faith is sufficient and his motivation correct. Usually this examination is oral and in private.

What minimum knowledge must each convert have? A grasp of the essential truths of the Faith, such as are contained in the formal profession of Faith, together with a knowledge of the principal formal prayers, Confession procedure, and the correct manner of assisting at Mass—these are sufficient. But the priest must not be too demanding,

for intellectual capacities vary greatly. "I do not," writes one alumnus, "require knowledge out of proportion with the person's usual understanding of things. The gift of Faith enables a person to be strong in his belief, even though his explanation of it seems basic in concept." If the candidate gives proof of real sincerity and balance, attends Mass regularly, prays faithfully, and knows the fundamentals well, the priest need have no fear in receiving him into the Church.

It was pointed out, however, that no one should be received unless he has attended instructions for at least three months. But even this is a bare minimum and the exception. A six months course is usual and preferable, for "the time element is important; it can be a test of one's sincerity and allows him to develop habits of prayer and regular attendance at Mass before he takes on the obligation." The convert must, in other words, make sure that he can live the life of God's Family, the Church, before he becomes her son through Baptism, the official adoption ceremony.

Once the convert is baptized, he must not be left to fend for himself in his new-found Faith. The transition he has made is one involving a whole new way of life for him, a real tearing up of roots. He must therefore be incorporated into parish life and made to feel truly at home in it. This is best effected through some sort of follow-up program. "The follow-up program is certainly a matter for serious consideration since the lack of community life in a parish can allow a new convert to feel somewhat like a stranger, and possibly lead to defection." Another priest writes, "The instructions are not the important thing. It's what you do with the convert afterward."

This follow-up program takes different forms. Perhaps a good one would be some sort of club for the new converts and their wives or husbands. The club could meet once a month to deepen their knowledge and appreciation of the Faith and develop their apostolic spirit through lectures and discussion. Or, there could be some system of sponsorship of the new converts by friendly and reliable Catholic who would take a real interest in the neophytes and help them in living the full Catholic life. Getting the people interested in a good Catholic paper or magazine suited to their

own level is a great help. Then again, converts could be urged to join one of the already existing parish organizations or home study groups, and the priest might even arrange for the organization to invite the new Catholic to join. By becoming a member of a good organization, the convert will not only meet other Catholics but he will feel himself a part of the Church's work. And "the average convert needs to be put to work doing something for the Church. Give him something to do. Make him feel a part of something. Try to make him apostolic. Get him involved when possible in helping others." One priest warns, however, that he likes his converts "to be firmly rooted, over their spiritual 'binge' (usually accompanying conversion), and all settled down as parishioners" before he lets them join specialized groups like third orders, CFM, and the Legion of Mary.

At any rate, it is clear that some type of follow-up program is not only useful, but necessary. It is of great value in stemming the tide of convert leakage from the Church, which has been estimated to average around fifteen or twenty per cent. Though the reasons for this leakage are varied, such as insufficient instruction, mistaking emotional satisfaction for intellectual conviction, or making marriage with a Catholic the sole reason for conversion, a good follow-up program will do much to keep weak converts in the fold and make the good ones mature and apostolic.

THE CONVERT

The convert usually comes from a nominally Protestant background. He has little knowledge of Christian doctrine, although he was probably baptized and may have gone to Sunday School till the age of ten or twelve. About seventy-five per cent of the time, he comes to the instructions already convinced of the truth of Catholicism but wants to be shown the fullness and beauty of Christ's teaching and obtain an intelligent understanding of the Church's claim to be the one true Church of Christ. He is therefore usually docile and sincere and desirous of learning, especially when he realizes that his happiness here and in eternity hangs in the balance.

Yet his very docility and enthusiasm can lead him to mistake for Faith the emotional security and stimulation he feels, so the

priest must allow him sufficient time before Baptism to assimilate gradually the doctrine he has heard and to let the emotional "glow" lose its force.

In spite of his initial enthusiasm the convert must oftentimes be led along and spurred on to reflection and study according to his capacity. Sometimes he tends toward a too-easy acceptance of half-understood doctrine. And he finds it hard, after an exhausting day's work, to grasp new notions and to remember what was said in former instructions.

FOR MARRIAGE

At times, the prospective convert, especially one who is taking instructions because he wants to marry a Catholic, will seem unenthusiastic and uninterested. In this case, the instructor's enthusiasm must be "catchy." Such a convert may wish to cut instructions to a minimum in order to be married on a certain date. He should be asked to continue instructions for two months or so after marriage. If he refuses, he should not be baptized; better a mixed marriage than a poor convert.

Or else the convert will be timid and silent, has no questions, and "understands" everything. Perhaps oral questions in private or some true and false exams will be good for this type.

Some prospective converts, of course, never go on to be baptized. In fact, only about seventy or eighty per cent finish the course of instructions, and about sixty per cent receive Baptism. There are a number of reasons why they do not enter the Church. Some do not want to hurt their family's feelings; others cannot accept the whole of Catholic teaching (her stand on birth control, for example); still others have marriage entanglements; and finally, some just lose interest or are unwilling to sacrifice their time. It is recommended to phone or drop a line to those who have not attended class for a while, but there should be no high-pressure insistence.

The other important person involved in convert-making is, of course, the priest. He must be above all a man of prayer who frequently asks God to help his prospective converts in their search for Faith. He needs the zeal, too, that will spur him on to seek out non-Catholics and enlist the aid of laymen in seeking them out. The priest must

be seen and known by as many as possible, for he is the father and shepherd of all in his parish, Catholic and non-Catholic.

And in teaching and counseling his converts, he must display real Christian sympathy and insight by entering into their hearts to feel what they feel. Sometimes they are insecure and bewildered, groping around in the darkness of doubt for the door that leads to Faith, and the priest that knows only how to throw off stock answers will keep that door closed. He must have insight into their difficulties and know the basic rules of good psychology in order to approach these difficulties from the right angle. Above all, the priest must show himself genuinely interested in each one of his converts; he must ever be friendly, kind, and tactful. One priest sums it all up this way.

"We must make our rectories, our churches, and ourselves available to people. We should eat at peoples' homes, go to their receptions. In other words, we must meet them whenever possible on their own ground. We must show them that we love them. We are priests; we must know our sheep and give them the kind of food they can handle. We are converting 140,000 a year. We could be converting 1,000,000 without much effort."

"We are priests" and priests-to-be, and so we belong in a special way to the Church, the Bride of Christ. Her thirst for the "other sheep" must burn fiercely in us, her chosen sons and ministers. We must strive to slake that thirst by generously spending ourselves in the work of gathering into one the scattered children of God.

What Does "Kerygmatic" Mean?

By F. Somerville, S.J.

Some time ago a reader of *The Sower* asked for an explanation of the word "kerygmatic" which catechetical writers seem to be using nowadays. Having used the word in an article for the *Clergy Review* the present writer received requests for enlightenment from priests who declared that in all their four years of theology course they had never heard the word used once, and at least one objected that it is not to be found in the *Oxford Concise Dictionary*. Is it, then, a newly-coined word to describe some fashion that will pass away or does it represent a well-founded trend in the teaching of religion, in spite of its strangeness?

The word has the most highly respectable origins. The noun, "kerygma," meaning a proclamation, is used several times in the New Testament, and the corresponding verb appears much more frequently. According to Scripture scholars, the kerygma is the first stage in the preaching of the apostles

given to non-Christians, with a view to winning converts; it is distinguished from catechesis, the second stage in apostolic preaching, which was aimed at giving a fuller instruction in Christian doctrine and morality. By way of illustration we may take the sermon of Peter on the first Pentecost, which is considered to be a typical example of primitive apostolic preaching. Peter was addressing non-Christians. He told his audience that the one whom the world had long awaited had already come; that he was Jesus of Nazareth who went about doing good in their midst, who died, rose again, who is now living and in whom is salvation. His aim was to inspire joy and admiration at this wonderful news, and to encourage the non-Christians to do something about it. Indeed, his listeners did ask: "What must we do?" And Peter bade them repent (i.e. be converted), believe in Jesus Christ and receive Baptism.

We read that as a result of Peter's sermon "about three thousand souls were won

for the Lord that day" (Acts 2:41). Now, take any one individual in that crowd. What happened to him? He was "converted"; he turned from his former way of life to embrace Christianity. He accepted the Christian truths, *en bloc* without instruction. He had heard the kerygma, the proclamation or message of our salvation in Christ. Afterwards came the second stage. The man who had come to believe in Jesus Christ attended the assemblies of Christians and received fuller instructions in the mysteries of faith. He learned the whole history of salvation which was made to center on the Person of Jesus Christ, with its attachment to the past (the Old Testament) and anticipation of the future (the second coming). This was the stage of catechesis, the purpose of which was, of course, to give a solid basis to the act of faith which the convert had already made.

Modern exegetes who have discovered this distinction between kerygma and catechesis in the primitive Church put us on our guard against separating the two, for there is a basic unity between them: the kerygma, the handing on of the good news, formed the core of the catechesis itself. "The kerygma is precisely the original nucleus of the Christian Message, as presented to non-Christians by the Apostles, and afterwards developed for converts in the course of catechetical instruction."

SCHOLASTIC OR PASTORAL

The content of the apostles' kerygmatic preaching, certainly inspiring and effective, as we learn from the book of the Acts, was slight in quantity; it consisted of telling the good news of salvation in Christ. Little or nothing abstract about it: just the telling of certain facts and the pressing invitation to act upon them. Even the further instruction, more doctrinal than the announcing of the good news, was not treated in an abstract way; the truths were explained in a Christ-centered perspective: we go to the Father in union with Jesus Christ.

In the course of the centuries, marked by a succession of heresies, by shifts in popular devotions and by the prevailing spirit of the times, the heart of the Christian Message became obscured in a multitude of doctrines; the faithful knew individual points of doctrine, but failed to see the organic unity of the whole. For the last

two hundred years the professional theologians, whose outlook is scholastic rather than pastoral, and who have exercised a great influence in the manner of handing on the faith, have not seen or else have not made clearly enough the distinction between lecturing to future priests and teaching the ordinary faithful. Nowadays, many people with pastoral aims chiefly in mind, maintain that we have a valuable lesson to learn from the past; the kerygma, that essential core of the Christian Message, should be made to stand out with all the simplicity and power of attraction that it possessed in the days of the apostles.

GLAD TIDINGS

When, therefore, we hear today such expressions as "kerygmatic teaching" and "kerygmatic approach," the people who use it mean that priests and teachers should strive to present the truths of faith as a message, a message of glad tidings; that they should put main stress on that bedrock of truth which forms the essential content of Christ's message; that they should bring out the unity and splendor of God's plan of salvation without allowing it to be buried under a mass of secondary considerations; that they should be God-centered and Christ-centered in their teaching: God has loved and saved us in Christ. This more concrete, personal and historical presentation of religion, so argue its advocates, is justified by the nature of revelation and is called for in order to meet the religious needs of people today.

There is no question of going back to the methods of the primitive or early Church. From the passages in the Acts we gather that the order followed was first, Conversion, then Baptism, then Instruction. At the later period of the catechumenate the stages were: 1. Conversion (with a more or less long period of trial), 2. Instruction, 3. Baptism, followed by further instruction. Today another order is followed in the majority of cases: 1. Baptism in infancy, 2. Instruction, given with varying effectiveness to children who go to Catholic schools—and what happens to the rest?—3. Conversion, taking this to mean conviction, a personal decision to live up to the faith—a very uncertain achievement if we are to judge by the lapsing of so many school leavers. We are satisfied with the order; uneasiness and dissatisfac-

tion are felt with regard to the second and third stages. Why do so many of our Catholics fail to make that personal convinced act of faith which leads them to live up to the exigencies of Baptism? And how much of the lapsing is due to the *quality* of the instruction given in our schools? A growing number of priests and teachers maintain

that for an effective instruction in the faith we need a kerygmatic renewal in our time.

The word itself is ugly and sounds pedantic. However, until some one thinks of a better alternative in English to describe the notion, we can surely teach in the spirit of messengers proclaiming a tremendously good news of vital importance to our hearers.

The Religious Dialogue

By Philip Scharper

When Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door at Wittenberg in 1517, he profoundly altered your life and mine—indeed the life of every Roman Catholic since his time.

For Luther's hammer blows were, in their effects, like the sounding of a tocsin, and there were many men of the caliber of Melanchthon, Zwingli, Calvin and Bucer who answered that call, made the rupture with Rome complete and shaped the nature of Protestantism as a distinctly different understanding of Christianity.

From that time to this, Roman Catholicism itself has been somewhat different. The Church has not, of course, altered in her essential understanding of herself, but she has often tended to define herself, as it were, in terms of what she was that Protestantism was not.

The Council of Trent (1545-63), for example, constituted the mold in which the modern Church was shaped, and the Council was called precisely to define and defend the Roman Catholic Faith on the points on which it had been either assailed or questioned by the Protestant Reformers.

Much was gained by the Council in terms of clarity, but much was lost in terms of completeness, as contemporary Catholic theologians are discovering.

The great stress laid by the Reformers upon the Scriptures alone as the rule of Christian Faith, for example, led many subsequent generations of Catholic bishops and priests to regard as potentially dangerous the

reading of the Bible by the laity. Catholics today are only slowly recovering an awareness that the Word of God is not only to be *heard* in His churches, but is to be *read* in one's home or even on subways and buses.

Again, the fact that the Reformers attacked the sacramental system of the Church led the Council vigorously to defend the validity of the seven sacraments (the Reformers tended to reduce the number to two or three), and to stress the fact that the sacraments give grace independently of the state of soul of the minister (*ex opere operato*).

Subsequent generations of theologians, elaborating on the formulations of the Council, have been concerned more with the *administration* of the sacraments than with their reception. It is only rather recently that we have begun to recover the earlier clear-eyed realization that the sacraments are the very gestures of Christ, inviting man to a personal encounter with Him, and imparting to the Christian a share in His own divine life. The sacraments thus make possible a union of love so staggering that the deepest of human loves pales beside it like a candle held against the sun.

What has happened then, in effect, is that as a consequence of the Protestant Reformation the Roman Catholic Church has, for four centuries, been forced to adopt, in part, a defensive attitude not only to the increasingly secularized world of Western civilization, but toward those millions of people in the Protestant churches who have claimed to be as authentically Christian as the Roman Catholic Church.

Even more tragic is the fact that, for over

four centuries, Catholics and Protestants have often violated the great command of charity in their relations to one another. A wall has been built between us, and both sides have stared at each other across that wall with glances of hostility, suspicion and rancor instead of love.

Love, according to the old maxim, is blind. It is not, of course—not if it is real love, certainly not if it is Christian charity. Hostility and bitterness are blind—not love—and the hostility that too often has marked the relations between Protestants and Catholics has kept both in semidarkness, unable to see each other clearly and therefore almost unable to understand one another.

Failing really to understand and know each other, we have fallen back upon clichés and stereotypes, most of which have been negative and unfavorable.

Thus all too many Catholics are prone to think of Protestantism as "watered-down Catholicism," and the individual Protestant, no matter how sincere, as being less fully committed to Christ than is the Catholic; as being a consummate individualist in religious matters—"his own pope," as the old cliché has it; and adhering, when all is said and done, to only one unvarying dogma—that the Catholic Church is obscurantist, opportunistic and obsolescent if not obsolete.

The Protestant, for his part, has his own uninformed, harshly critical stereotype of the Catholic, whom he views in purely negative terms as the benighted member of a repressive, authoritarian Church, who cannot eat meat on Friday, who cannot miss Mass on Sunday, who cannot divorce his wife, who cannot practice birth control, who cannot send his children to public schools and who cannot see "condemned" movies.

Fortunately, under the guiding hand of God, a change has been taking place in Protestant-Catholic relations over the last ten years, and we may hope that the next ten may see the final smashing of the kind of unfair and offensive stereotype with which, in our mutual ignorance, we have been dealing with each other.

Curiosity is slowly replacing complacent ignorance, friendliness (not yet, I am afraid, the awesome virtue of charity) is replacing hostility, and openness is inexorably replacing suspicion.

More and more, Protestants are becoming aware that they must confront the Catholic not in the light of what Catholicism means

to them, but of what it means to him.

Catholics increasingly are aware that the Protestant is not merely a non-Catholic, but is one who feels that *he* possesses the primitive and authentic Christian revelation in its fullness. To the Protestant (no matter what the Catholic thinks), his religious commitment is solid and substantial and he is convinced that if there is such a thing as "watered-down Christianity," it is to be found within the Church of Rome.

We have reached a point in post-Reformation history, then, when instead of looking at one another in strained silence, we are beginning (cautiously) to talk to one another. After four hundred years a "dialogue" between Protestants and Catholics has begun.

The idea of a dialogue, of course, presupposes that we have two real persons seriously attempting serious communication on serious matters. If one does all the talking, it is a monologue. If one expects only to admonish and instruct the other, it is a sermon. If both talk only to score points or to expose the other's weaknesses, it is a debate. If neither takes the subject seriously, it is badinage. If neither takes the other person seriously, it is banter. If each takes seriously both the subject and the other person, it is dialogue.

In this sense, dialogue obviously demands that we know who we really are, and who the other person really is. I think it accurate to say that many of us American Catholics are not too sure who we really are.

Our knowledge of the Church and her teachings has been gleaned from catechisms, religion courses and sermons—and these sources, no matter how good, are not adequate for the demands of the dialogue. They could hardly be expected to give us a full, rich, adult understanding of what it means, really, to be a Roman Catholic, a member of Christ's Mystical Body, "another Christ" in our small share of space and time.

Most of what we learned about our Faith we learned when we were young and immature (including our college years), and the presentation of the immense treasures of the Faith had to be tempered to our immaturity. Further, as I mentioned above, much of even that necessarily limited presentation was cast in a rather defensive mold to enable us to answer questions about our Faith or to refute attacks against it.

But the real task of the Catholic is not to debate his Faith, but to live it, and we can all use—until the day we die—additional insights into exactly what that Faith is which we are to live, and how we are to live it. Quite apart from “the dialogue” we need continuing help to discover what a Catholic really is.

Fortunately, we have such helps in a number of good books easily available. To cite but a few, there are *The Spirit of Catholicism* by Karl Adams; *The Splendour of the Church* and *Catholicism* by Henri de Lubac, S.J., and Ronald Knox's *The Belief of Catholics*. Books such as these will help us, as Catholics, to realize who we are.

But we must also know to whom we are talking in the dialogue which is beginning to take place on almost every level, from seminary to street corner. Who are these Protestants? If we are to talk to them seriously we must strive to understand what a Protestant is—not in our definitions, but in his.

Here, too, good books can help us; they are, in fact, indispensable. And one of the

very best has recently appeared: *The Spirit of Protestantism* by Robert McAfee Brown.

Doctor Brown is too good a Christian to be merely kind when candor is called for, and too good a Protestant to define Protestantism in terms of a rejected Roman Catholicism. He is writing primarily for his fellow Protestants, and consequently is not concerned with whatever Catholic may happen to read his book.

For the Catholic who looks on the dialogue as the preamble to a convert class, Doctor Brown's book will be as discouraging as it is illuminating, for it makes terribly clear the theological chasms which separate Protestant and Catholic.

The dialogue is really a calling back and forth across these chasms and, knowing who we are and to whom we are calling, we must always be scrupulously sure that we call to one another in the tones of charity. The theological chasms are broad and deep, and only God can bridge them. The ultimate scandal then—to Christian and non-Christian alike—will not be our failure to agree. It will only be our failure to love.

READING I'VE LIKED

“Pamphlet Bible Series.” Pioneer five-year project, under editorial supervision of Neil J. McEleney, C.S.P. Each of the Old Testament Books appearing monthly since January 1960 provides General Introduction; Biblical text; readable and up-to-date commentary by a member of the Catholic Biblical Association of America; with self-teaching quiz. 50¢ a piece. Discount for bulk orders. Subscription rate \$6.00 a year. Ideal for pamphlet racks, schools, and study clubs. The Paulist Press, 180 Varick Street, New York 14, N. Y.

“New Testament Reading Guide.” A series of 14 attractive pamphlets. Prepared under the editorial supervision of Rev. Barnabas M. Ahern, C.P., Mother Kathryn Sullivan, R.S.C.J., and Rev. William Heidt, O.S.B. Widely recommended, they provide an Introduction to the New Testament; the Biblical text of each book; and smoothly written commentaries by able scholars; with abundant teaching aids. 30¢ a piece. The Liturgical Press, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota.

GUIDE

- Official publication of the *Paulist Institute for Religious Research*.
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GUIDE

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Guide Lights

MATER ET MAGISTRA . . .

The Catholic Interracial Council of New York has released a number of laudatory comments on Pope John's first encyclical. Among them are the following.

Thurgood Marshall, counsel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, stated: "I believe this historic document will be hailed by leaders of opinion throughout the world. It most certainly will encourage all of us who are engaged in securing full recognition of the civil rights of all men."

Benjamin R. Epstein, national director of the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, said: "In urging that all citizens 'feel responsible for bringing about the common good in all spheres of life,' Pope John provides inspiration and guidelines for men of all faiths."

Kenneth B. Clark, psychology professor of the City College of New York, said: "Of special significance to the social scientists and other students of world events is the Pope's emphasis on the imperative need for economic cooperation among all the peoples of the world."

S. Garry Oniki, associate executive director of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U. S. A., said: "The encyclical deserves to be widely studied and pondered by leaders in all areas of life. It is my hope that it will be the subject of continued dialogue between Protestants and Roman Catholics."

John Slawson, executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee, said: "To members of the Jewish community and religion, there are many teachings in this courageous and far-visioned encyclical regarding the social and economic order which evoke a particular sympathy because their spirit and expression are so profoundly imbued with the ancient biblical and prophetic zeal for social justice."

THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL . . .

In the course of his address at the closing session of the Ecumenical Council preparatory commissions, Pope John said, "The principal points concerning the structure and organization of our future council meetings were outlined with clarity and with general agreement, brought into the light and submitted for study for that time when we shall enter the main and substantial phase of our

work. Among the different subjects which we are pleased to recall here are those which were outlined with precise synthesis concerning the people invited to study the serious complex of doctrine and discipline which will mark the successful outcome of the council; concerning the choice of theologians and of canonists, concerning the practical rules of discussion and the methods of voting. As far as Latin is concerned, it is clear that this must be the official language of the council, but should the occasion or need arise, it will be possible for one to express himself and have his opinions recorded in the spoken language of his country."

CHRISTIAN UNITY . . .

Bishop John Wright of Pittsburgh was one of the three U. S. representatives at the fourth Summer School of the Maynooth Union which focused its attention on the subject of Christian unity. Bishop Wright sounded a keynote which was repeated in different ways by several lecturers.

"The nostalgia," he said, "for the unity of Christendom among non-Catholic Christians presented at once a problem and an opportunity for Catholics. The problem was reconciling the dictates of a conciliatory spirit with the clear duty of fidelity to apostolic faith. The opportunity was the area of greatly increased charity, patience and understanding. . . . Above all, if there cannot be immediate unity of faith, there must be unity of love, expressing itself in common effort in social, economic, and political relations."

The question of individual conversions arose in many private conversations and was found in the background of several of the discussions. It was generally agreed that the purpose of ecumenism is not to try to make converts, but to change the climate of opinion. But there seemed to be no disposition to feel that there was any real opposition between corporate and individual influence.

Conversation and conversion are not at odds. They both look to unity, but one to a unity of love, the other to a unity of faith. And always there is the hope that beyond the horizon of our present vision there will be at length a blessed convergence.

For those attracted to the Church, direct efforts at conversion are legitimate. For others, the ecumenical approach.

RELIGION AND POLITICS . . .

The National Conference of Christians and Jews will launch a four-year program designed to raise the general level of public discussion and understanding among religious groups differing on current issues. The program has been made possible by a grant of \$325,000.00 from the Ford Foundation. The project will be known as Religious Freedom and Public Affairs.

The Conference President, Dr. Lewis Webster Jones, in announcing the project, said, "There is considerable confusion about the meaning of religious liberty, about the important points of agreement or disagreement between faiths, about the meaning of political democracy, and about the application of religious and ethical values to practical public affairs. Unless some clearer consensus can be reached, the strength and unity which America has drawn from the common acceptance of the Judaeo-Christian tradition will be weakened and dissipated."

Dr. Jones stated that the three main objectives of the project would be: (1) to analyze the varied practical and theoretical problems involving political action and religious freedom; (2) to bring greater intellectual coherence and depth into inter-religious relationships and public policy; (3) to lessen destructive conflict created by different religious approaches to social problems.

As part of the over-all project, conference leaders will prepare and distribute program materials bearing on controversial problems. These materials will include the translation of major articles and theological changes published abroad, commissioned articles and books, and reprints of background materials.

For further information write to the National Conference of Christians and Jews, 43 West 57th Street, New York City.

WHY THEY LEAVE . . .

In an article in *Information Magazine*, Richard J. Cusack states that investigation discloses similar characteristics which recur again and again in the stories of those who leave the Church.

1. *Collapse of family life.* A breakdown in the family structure—separation, divorce, a drinking problem—often brings about a breakdown in religious practices.

2. *Lack of religious training.* Misinformation on the belief and teachings of the Church is common among ex-Catholics.

3. *Mixed marriages.* Although sociological studies are not extensive or complete enough for experts to measure exactly how many Catholics and their offspring are lost to the

Faith through mixed marriages, those who have dealt with the problem say the Catholic parties lost outnumber conversions.

4. *The personality of a priest, sister or brother.* Although this factor is mentioned frequently by fallen-aways, analysts doubt that this is the only or even the principal cause for any substantial percentage of Catholics leaving the Church.

5. *Secular influences.* A relativistic view of manners and morals which are at odds with the moral teachings of the Church oftentimes cause Catholics to leave the Church.

TAPE OF THE MONTH . . .

The Liturgical Week, held in Oklahoma City, August 21 to 24, heard a report from the Tape of the Month Club. It is a Cincinnati-based committee of the North American Liturgical Conference. It prepares tapes that bring major addresses on divine worship and the sacramental life of the Church to many thousands beyond the original audience.

Among the speakers are James Cardinal Lercaro, Archbishop of Bologna, on "Liturgy and Social Action"; Father Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., editor of *Worship*, "The Church Year in Action"; Bishop John J. Wright of Pittsburgh, "The Hierarchy as the Expression of Charity"; Bishop Nicholas T. Elko of the Byzantine Rite Diocese of Pittsburgh, "Church Unity"; and Father Frederick McManus, president of the Liturgical Conference, "Law and the Liturgical Spirit."

The committee has been sending tape-recorded talks to 575 groups, each of which has agreed to schedule at least two discussions a month of the current tape. According to the report, 185 of the tapes are going to convents and motherhouses of religious communities. More than 150 go to parish priests for use in their parishes. About 70 go directly to lay groups.

Club headquarters are at 3307 Clifton Ave., Cincinnati 20, Ohio.

INSIDE THE INSTITUTE . . .

The Paulist Institute has resumed its workshops on convert work. In September Fathers McGinn and Keating conducted one for the priests of Lincoln, Nebraska, and Fathers Lloyd and Keating held one at St. Thomas Seminary in Denver. For information on workshops and seminary courses on convert work write to The Paulist Institute, 411 West 59th Street, New York 19, N. Y.

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